

## NEWS UPDATE FROM THE NATIONAL CONSUMER FEDERATION DECEMBER 2007

***NCF WISHES ALL READERS A HAPPY  
CHRISTMAS AND A PROSPEROUS NEW  
YEAR***



It's off to Church on Christmas morning at Witley Court, Worcestershire.

### **'CLASSIC' VISA CARD LAUNCHED BY HALIFAX**

Halifax has launched a credit card that charges an interest rate of 27.9%. The rate on the bank's Classic Visa product is significantly higher than the rate of 8.9% available on its cheapest credit card.

Halifax says its latest offering is targeted at people with little or no credit history, such as people living in rented accommodation or on low incomes or recently divorced. It dismissed concerns that people who may have been accepted for a standard credit card could be offered a card with a higher rate.

In *The Independent* online on December 5<sup>th</sup> Samantha Owens, spokesperson for the comparison site Moneyfacts.co.uk, said that in the light of the credit crunch many Britons could expect to have to pay more for their borrowing. It's even possible they may not be able to find a lender at all.

### **SLAUGHTERHOUSES TO PAY MORE**

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) proposes to increase their charges to approved meat premises for hygiene and animal welfare official controls by approximately 8%. These are planned to come into force on March

31<sup>st</sup> 2008, which is the start of the MHS new charging period. Some increases, necessary to bring charges up to the minimum laid down by the EC, will be implemented on 31<sup>st</sup> December.

Why is this necessary? While the EC regulation requires that charges be made to industry for the cost of meat hygiene and animal welfare official controls it also says that, in general, the charges must not be more than actual costs and, if I interpret the official speak correctly, no less either.

The MHS says that the cost of controls has been increasing and the proportion that is charged to the industry has fallen substantially since the present charging system was introduced in 2001. There is now a need for businesses to pay a greater portion of the cost, in line with Government cost sharing policy. The proposals would increase the costs to businesses by approximately £1.5 million in 2008/9.

However the MHS aims to reduce significantly the cost of delivering official controls over the next five years. They seem to be taking quite drastic action to achieve a reduction of £4 million during 2008/9 by reducing the number of meat hygiene inspectors.

A public written consultation has started and responses are required in the MHS office by January 11<sup>th</sup> next year. Your efficient secretary has the papers and no doubt other copies can be obtained for those wishing to contribute to NCF's response.

### **DEBBIE REYNOLDS**

At one time very few people knew who the government's chief veterinary officer was. Of recent time the post has become much more high profile and, I imagine, much more difficult. I am not altogether surprised to learn that Debbie Reynolds, the Chief Vet has taken early retirement after four years in the post.

During her time as Chief Vet, Dr Reynolds took charge of the battle to confront a wide range of animal health issues, including incidences of Avian Influenza, the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak and the appearance of Bluetongue disease in recent

months. Defra Secretary of State Hilary Benn said "I am extremely grateful for Debby's advice and hard work on behalf of the Department both during the recent animal disease outbreaks and over the years. I wish her all the very best in her future career."

Her deputy Fred Landeg will take over in an acting capacity until a new Chief Vet is appointed.

### **WE KNOW ABOUT SATNAV BUT HOW ABOUT SATLAV OR EVEN LAVNAV?**

Westminster City Council has launched a small messaging service (SMS) to inform people in their area of the whereabouts of the nearest public toilets. They say they are doing this because the area's alleys, parks and secluded corners are at risk of being sprayed with 45,460 litres of urine as a result of irresponsible and antisocial behaviour. It is not clear how they arrived at this figure.

Users text 'toilet' to 80097 and the service determines their location and finds the nearest public access toilet for them. The service has a database of 40 Council public toilets in Westminster plus those of the Greater London Authority, London Underground and some major department stores. Each text to the SatLav service costs 25p.

A Westminster Councillor said "Nobody should ever get caught short again and we know how important that is, be it for a young mum with children in tow or friends on a shopping trip or night out". Well yes, but what if you do not have a mobile phone? Well, as my mother told me, "You ask a policeman".

### **FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY OPEN BOARD MEETING**

The next Food Standards Agency Open Board Meeting starts at **9.00am** on Thursday **13 December** 2007 at the **Hotel Russell, Russell Square**, London, WC1B 5BE.

The agenda will include discussions on Trans Fatty Acids and Safer Food and the Better Business: Early Stage Report. At the end of the public meeting there will be a

Question and Answer session where members of the public are encouraged to ask questions or make comment on any of the matters discussed by the Board or, indeed, raise any other issues relating to our work.

If you would like to attend you should register with Glasgows, the agents for these open meetings, **now** at: [fsboardmeetings@glasgows.co.uk](mailto:fsboardmeetings@glasgows.co.uk)

### **Board Papers**

Board papers for this meeting will be available to download from [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk) The Agency has decided that it will no longer mail out hardcopies of Board papers.

### **Ways to participate in an Open Board Meeting Online**

The Agency has, for several years now, webcast the proceedings live and on-demand over the Internet via [food.gov.uk](http://food.gov.uk). If you cannot attend you can watch the live webcast commencing at 9.00am. This is also supported by a podcast archive of audio content.

### **TOTAL BAN ON MOBILE PHONES?**

According to a trade journal, Jim Fitzpatrick, the Transport Secretary has not dismissed the possibility of a total ban on mobile phones. He was reported as having said that there were no current plans for a ban, but there was growing evidence that using a phone, even a hands-free version, was a serious distraction for drivers. I think we knew that.

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL CONSUMER FEDERATION - REGISTERED CHARITY NO.1101414, REGISTERED OFFICE, 180 HIGH ST., WEST MOLESEY, SURREY. KT82LX - IN FURTHERANCE OF ITS AIM TO EDUCATE AND INFORM CONSUMERS. SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMPILER - JOHN BROWN - AT [john.brown@merula.co.uk](mailto:john.brown@merula.co.uk) TO RECEIVE COPIES EMAIL NCF SECRETARY STELLA NICHOLAS [secretary@ncf.info](mailto:secretary@ncf.info) or phone 020 8941 2513,

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